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*Perfect Girl*

Originally printed as part of 'Silly Bitch', published by Soup Gallery x Foolscap Editions to accompany Tulani Hlalo's solo exhibition.

We spend our weekends soaking in shampoo suds. Her and I. Between blow outs and bubbles and mwah mwah mwah! She kisses me right on the mouth. I'm so good. I'm so special. I'm better than the rest. She beams and a familiar hot glow spreads inside me. The lather levitates, floating into a love heart that halos her face, as soft focus fades all around us.

She thinks I'm the one. Whispers it to her husband, dishes it out to clients, and even goes as far as to tell my brothers and sisters... that my coat, unlike theirs, has everything that she could have ever wished for. A winner, baby.

Sometimes, in the dead of the night, I'll stir and wake with her eyes on me. Her body lying on the cold linoleum just outside my cage, curled up just like mine. By morning she'll be gone.

We take long drives, just the two of us. Suburbia opening up to rolling plains rising to jagged mountain passes, and she sings to pass the time.

♪ *I've never known a girl like you before* ♪

*Look there's the turning for Hurricane, we don't want one of those do we? Or a tornado. Not even a rain cloud. Let's keep all those perfect hairs in their perfect place on my perfect girl.*

I know better than to hang my head out of the window.

We speed and sing and steal smiles at intersections. She loves it when I join in off-key, and throws her head back to release a laugh, reminding me – *That's right angel, get it all out now. We need you silent tomorrow... just like a statue! Just like we practiced.*

If my coat is her first love, then my poise is a close second. Long, shapely legs that I can stretch forwards and backwards depending on her direction. A back that arches in all the right places. A neck that extends to true north, pushing my chest forward at an angle that seems unnatural. Gentle prods and subtle pokes have sculpted this position within me. My muscles remember what she wants.

We spend nights in hotel rooms. With exciting smells. Soaking in the tub and ordering room service. For all this novelty, she never forgets our ritual vitamins and supplements. Of one-hundred-and-one-brushes-before-lights-out. I wait until her breathing softens and slows, then climb onto Sateen eiderdowns or Crimplene throws to stretch out beside her. Nose resting on pillow, tail extending past her calves. I hold my stretch for as long as I can; mirroring our arms, matching our legs.

It all changes in noisy halls, where her brow stitches together, and her heartbeat hurries. I hold still with my 'chin up!' but struggle to hear her melody over the hum of razors, the whirl of dryers and the shrill chatter of women in tracksuits.

From the very edge of my right eye I see a man wearing a bowtie. He booms into a microphone as a cartoonish clock ticks over the speaker system. Five minutes left contestants. Her hands are working all over my body and the lights are baking hot, but I cannot break a sweat. Not now, not yet.

Two minutes. Sweltering. Her open mouth pants. She unbuttons her shirt and carefully reaches inside to bring out her heart; a firm grip between forefinger and thumb. Offering it to me and only me. She slides it past my nose. Whispers –

*Angel. You can have the treat in sixty seconds. Count down with me. One per-fect-ion, two per-fection.*

The phantoms of her fingers are nudging me into place and my neck cranes higher. I want that treat so – so – bad.

The bell rings.

I hope they see that I've done everything I could have. I always do.